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ABSTRACT

Designed to assist disabled students and professionals working with them to become aware of the Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the fact sheet details how to access and utilize the education-related services of this federal-state funded program. Following a description of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), the fact sheet provides information on: (1) where to find VR offices; (2) how to contact local VR offices; (3) what happens once an individual visits a VR office; (4) how eligibility is determined; (5) who pays for services; (6) the importance of an Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP); (7) steps to take if dissatisfied with a VR counselor or decision; and (8) how long VR services will be provided. Because the client in this program is in charge of his/her rehabilitation program and the counselor/agency act in an assistant capacity, emphasis is placed on the responsibility of the client/student to complete paperwork, meet deadlines, and keep counselors informed of progress. (LH)

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VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

A POSTSECONDARY STUDENT CONSUMER'S GUIDE

by

Nancy L. Stout

EC 165 112

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Higher Education and the Handicapped Resource Center — a national clearinghouse on postsecondary education for disabled people • One Dupont Circle, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 • 202/833-4707 (Voice/TTY)

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES A POSTSECONDARY STUDENT CONSUMER'S GUIDE

This fact sheet is designed to assist disabled students and professionals working with them to become aware of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and how to access and utilize the education related services of this Federal-state funded program.

What is Vocational Rehabilitation?

Vocational Rehabilitation is the nationwide Federal-state program for assisting eligible disabled people to become employable. The primary goal of the program is to assist disabled individuals to reach a suitable employment objective. Education and training at a vocational-technical school, college, or university may be part of the plan to reach that objective, thus state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies often provide assistance to disabled students in pursuing a postsecondary education. Vocational Rehabilitation may be referred to as Voc Rehab or VR.

Where can I find Voc Rehab offices?

Each state and U.S. territory and the trust islands maintain a vocational rehabilitation agency. Scope and quality of service may vary from state to state. In some states there are two agencies: a general agency and one for blind and visually impaired persons only. In other states, there is one agency to serve people with all disabilities. Each state agency has a central or administrative office and district offices that usually are scattered throughout the service area.

To find the Vocational Rehabilitation agency in your area look under the State listing in the telephone book. Local libraries, health and human service offices and high school guidance offices may also be able to tell you how to contact the local VR office. You may also contact the HEATH Resource Center for your State Agencies List.

How do I contact the local VR office?

It is best to make the first contact by phone or by letter (either personal or from a referring professional or agency). When making the initial contact by telephone or letter, a trained receptionist will usually answer your questions and arrange an interview with a rehabilitation counselor. An individual is also welcome to make a personal visit during the hours of operation which are usually 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. On a drop-in basis usually you will be seen by an intake counselor or be given an interview appointment for a later time.

What will happen when I go to a VR office?

Each individual is asked to complete a formal application for service. The application generally consists of a personal data form which must be signed. A staff person is usually available to assist with the completion of the application form.

Having completed an application form you will be assigned to a vocational rehabilitation counselor. The counselor will be assigned to you generally because either 1) the counselor services the area in which you happen to reside, or 2) you have a disability which may require a specialist.

The counselor will ask you to make an appointment to have a general medical examination. Depending on your particular disability other evaluations may be required such as vision examinations, psychological tests, hearing examinations and other special studies. In some cases reports of these examinations, if recent, can be obtained from your doctor or other specialists who have provided care and treatment to you. These examinations are necessary since VR must have medical evidence that you have a disability and that you can be employed if services are provided.

Other pertintent records such as school transcripts, work history, military records and perhaps social security data may be requested. It is helpful to bring these records with you for your initial interivew with the VR counselor.

Will I automatically receive services if I am disabled?

No. The VR program is an *eligibility* program, not an *entitlement* program. Those applying for vocational rehabilitation services

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should bear in mind that the determination of eligibility is an individualized process based on each unique situation. Eligibility is determined by a state rehabilitation counselor based on criteria in the state approved VR plan.

How will my eligibility be determined?

States participating in the rehabilitation program have been mandated by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-112) and amendments of 1978 (P.L. 95-602) to emphasize the delivery of services to the most severely handicapped individuals. This mandate to make services to severely handicapped people a priority also extends to the eligibility determination process.

The law requires that every applicant for the vocational rehabilitation program be certified as eligible or ineligible for services. The written certification must be dated and signed by an authorized state agency staff person/counselor.

Eligibility for rehabilitation service is determined on the basis of three criteria:

1. An individual must have a physical or mental disability.

2. The disability creates or causes a substantial handicap to employment.

3. There is a reasonable expectation that the provision of vocational rehabilitation services can benefit the individual in terms of employability.

According to the Rehabilitation regulations, a *physical or mental disability* means "a physical or mental condition which materially limits, contributes to limiting, or if not corrected, will probably result in limiting an individual's activities or functioning." Also as defined by regulations, a *substantial handicap to employment* means "that a physical or mental disability (in light of attendant medical, psychological, vocational, educational, or related factors) impedes an individual's occupational performance by preventing obtaining, retaining, or preparing for employment consistent with his/her capabilities and abilities."

Employability with regard to vocational rehabilitation refers to "a determination that the provision of vocational rehabilitation services will enable an individual to obtain or retain employment consistent with his/her capacities and abilities in the competitive labor market, (such as the practice of a profession), self employment, homemaking, farm or family work (including work for which payment is in kind rather than in cash), sheltered employment, homebound employment, or other gainful work."

The determination of eligibility can be more than a simple matter of reviewing data and making a decision in a few days. It often takes special time and effort to ascertain eligibility. This is particularly true when determining the eligibility of a severely handicapped individual. In these situations, the state rehabilitation counselor may decide that an extension of time is necessary to adequately consider all factors. The State VR program permits an extended evaluation period of up to 18 months to determine an individual's eligibility. The extended evaluation period may be terminated, when an eligibility determination is made, at any time prior to the expiration of eighteen months. Otherwise, at the end of the eighteen months the evaluation is automatically terminated and some decision is made regarding eligibility.

The application of the eligibility criteria must be made without regard to race, sex, color, creed or national origin. A state may not impose any prior residential requirements as a condition for eligibility.

With respect to a certification of ineligibility, the individual must be notified in writing of the action taken, the reasons for the action, and the person's rights and means for expressing and seeking remedy for any dissatisfaction, including the state's procedures for administrative review and fair hearings.

Who Will Pay For These Services?

Vocational Rehabilitation will pay for all services (this includes medical and psychological examinations) required to determine if you are eligible for the program.

If you are eligible for the program, you will be asked to provide information concerning your income and your expenses. This information is required so that the counselor can determine what financial assistance VR can give you. In some cases, VR will be able to pay for all services you need as part of your own rehabilitation plan. Depending upon your income, you may have to share the cost of services. The counselor will fully explain these arrangements before you begin a rehabilitation plan.

What Is An IWRP?

When eligibility has been determined the rehabilitation counselor is responsible for developing, with the handicapped person, an Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan, IWRP, specifying the services to be provided and objectives and employment goals to be achieved. The counselor is responsible for assisting the individual throughout the rehabilitation process, in obtaining appropriate employment, and in providing post-employment services necessary for maintaining employment.

The IWRP is a jointly written service plan between a student and the State Vocational Rehabilitation agency. The responsibilities of the student and the State Vocational Rehabilitation agency

should be clearly stated in the IWRP. The student may request a copy of the IWRP.

The IWRP is very important. It becomes the written plan of action between the client and the state agency.

The IWRP requires the signatures of both the counselor and the student, parent or legal guardian. The IWRP usually requires the approval of a rehabilitation supervisor or administrator in addition to the counselor. Some rehabilitation plans may be carried out over a period of several years. Situations and circumstances may develop which were unforseeable at the time the plan was written. Modifications and amendments to the original plan can be made when there is reasonable and logical justification for so doing. The student may also request a copy of modifications and amendments to the IWRP.

If a postsecondary student is a client of the State Vocational Rehabilitation program, he/she must meet with the rehabilitation counselor to insure that needed support services are included in the IWRP. It is important to do this early to allow necessary time for authorizations for services to be received by the school business office and Student Services Office.

It is very important to get paperwork completed before it is due so that there is time to deal with the unexpected. Don't assume that VR and your school will take care of everything. You as a client/student have a major responsibility to meet deadlines, keep your VR counselor informed of school requirements and due dates and to let him/her know of your progress toward your academic and vocational goals. The client is in charge of his/her rehabilitation program and the counselor/agency act in an assistant capacity.

What If I Disagree With My VR Counselor?

Differences of opinion concerning rehabilitation services can develop between a counselor and client. If you don't agree with the way your case is being handled, talk it over with your VR counselor. In most cases the two of you will be able to solve the problem. If you still don't agree with your counselor you may discuss it with your counselor's supervisor.

The supervisor will examine your concern and let you know his/her decision. If you are still not satisfied, you may request a review by the Regional Director. This is called an Administrative Review.

Your problem should be presented in writing to the Regional Director. Your VR counselor/supervisor must assist you with this review. If dissatisfied with the decision, you can request a Fair Hearing.

A Fair Hearing is a formal procedure. It is held before the State Director or his designee. The Fair Hearing is your final opportunity to ask for a change in the way your case is being handled inside the VR process.

When Will VR Services Stop?

Clients are served until successfully rehabilitated or a determination is made that the vocational rehabilitation goal cannot be achieved. Under the vocational rehabilitation program, clients are not considered "rehabilitated" until the state VR agency determines that they have been suitably and satisfactorily employed for at least 60 days.

For the address of your State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency request a "State Agencies List" from the HEATH Resource Center.

Prepared by Nancy L. Stout, Resource Coordinator, HEATH Resource Center, March 1983.

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